

UHPC WORSHIP      OCTOBER 27, 2019

SERMON TOPIC:      **“BLESSINGS OF THE FORMER AND LATTER RAIN”**

**A “POST-PREACHING” NOTE: *Just to bring the reader(s) into alignment with how I believe the Holy Spirit was working, and the divine hand of God was responding to the theme above and the spoken word.* If you didn’t already know, it rained “cats and dogs” all this morning until after 2:00 p.m. This subject was chosen over a week ago and the sermon written several days ahead. I did not equate what was happening outdoors with this sermon, nor did I really appreciate that this might have been God’s response of a “Double Blessing” for this church, its prayers over many months, and for this event. But it became clear to me as I was preaching that RAIN was spiritually symbolic of God’s bountiful blessings of the Holy Spirit as well as of material blessings. I prayed all night and all morning for God to hold back the rain. I didn’t realize that I might have been asking God to hold back the blessings. But now I thank the LORD that it was not held back; for God was determined to give us these blessings despite my request to stop the rain, for I did not perceive or discern this was God’s way of showing us what is in store for us. So, despite the showers of... heavy, unrelenting, rain, there was a decent “turn-out” a joyful worship service in the sanctuary, and a full dinner and program in the Parish Hall. I thank God for His steadfast love and mercy, and His persistence in pouring out a double blessing of the Former and the Latter Rain upon us. May it not end here, but continue to be poured out in our lives, in our ministries, in our families, in our health, our finances, etc. for a very long time. May the windows of heaven remain open and the blessings continue to fall upon us, for it is in the name of Christ Jesus and for His sake we lift our prayer unto our Heavenly Father--ABBA! AMEN!**

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Blessings come in various ways. It comes in health and strength, in family love, peace, unity, growth, and increase. It may come in financial success, and provisions of various kinds. Today we hear the Prophet Joel speaking of two types of blessings. He refers to them as **the Former and the Latter Rain**. Joel speaks of material blessings such as the **threshing floors being full of wheat and the vats overflowing with oil and wine**. Solomon writes in **Proverbs 3: 9-10 about honoring God with the first fruits of our substance and the first fruits of our produce; then our barns will be filled with plenty, and our vats will be bursting with wine**. Later Joel wrote of a kind of spiritual correction that Jehovah God Himself had sent upon Israel to chasten them for their unbridled disobedience and sins. For **it was the LORD who had sent swarms of hoppers, grubs, and locusts to destroy their crops, animals, and produce**.

However, when they listened and responded with prayer and fasting, the LORD was now ready to show mercy and to restore doubly what was taken from them. It is NOT God’s desire to punish His people, but in order to keep us near or to bring us back to Himself, He will allow “not so nice” things to come into our lives to correct our ways so that He can restore His blessings

upon us. The blessings they formerly enjoyed was taken away because of their disobedience and sin of idolatry. But now that they returned to their God He as quick and happy to replenish. This is how merciful and gracious our God is. It is not God's will that we perish, but that all should come to repentance and have everlasting life. No longer would they be ashamed, for once again they would realize that He, Jehovah God, is still their only True and Living God. Their former blessings were about to be restored now as an abundance of a Latter Rain. Joel had warned them from God that if they did not correct their ways, there would be desolation and absolute destruction against them. But you know how we people can be --- **We have to see it to believe it.** They did not take heed until their FORMER BLESSINGS WERE WIPED OUT and they were put to shame and open disgrace. The barns were ruined, the cattle were bewildered, fires consumed the pastures, the deserts, the trees of the countryside, and the waters were dried up. WHAT DOES THIS TELL US? I believe it is this: --If we desire to receive and to retain God's blessings, we need to abide in God's Grace and be obedient to what God's Word is teaching us. For those who obey, even when disaster comes, God will make a way of escape for them/us.

In a previous chapter, Joel was told to call the whole nation of Israel to a fast of confession and repentance before the True and Living God who is Holy. He told them that if they did this with sincerity, maybe God would hold back the destruction that was pronounced against them and bless them once more. THERE COULD POSSIBLY BE A LATTER RAIN OF BLESSINGS OUT Poured UPON THEM, UPON THEIR FAMILIES, AND UPON THE VERY EARTH, UPON THEIR ANIMALS ALSO. God would even pour out His Holy Spirit anew upon all flesh. Spiritual gifts and fruits would be restored and revived so that young men would dream dreams, and old men would see visions. Their sons and their daughters would prophesy. WHY WOULD ALL THIS HAPPEN? It would happen because they returned with fasting, prayer, with sincere repentance, and once more acknowledge the one True and Living God of their ancestors. David continued the theme of lush blessings of abundance using the same symbol of refreshing and luscious rain.

In Psalms 65:5-13 David declares that praise awaits God in Zion because the people performed their vows to the God who answers prayers and atones for their sins. When this happens, the LORD comes near to His people and blesses us/them with the goodness of His house. He answers them with awesome deeds of righteousness, clothe them with His power, and stills the storms of their lives.

Both Joel and David encourage us to REJOICE at the opening of the morning or at dawn, and at the gateway or twilight of the evening. He tells us to **Rejoice for the LORD is watering the earth and enriching it so that the river-banks overflow and its ridges are watered. He blesses us with grain, with growth, and crowns the year with abundance.** Let there be joy and rejoicing everywhere. HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO LIVE IN SUCH A SITUATION? I encourage you now to shout a DEFIANT PRAISE UNTO GOD FOR WHAT GOD HAS ALREADY DONE, IN WHAT GOD IS

DOING RIGHT NOW, AND ALL THAT GOD HAS STORED UP FOR OUR FUTURE IN BLESSINGS OF ALL KINDS. SHOUT OUT NOW: "HALLELUJAH!" (rept...)

The year 2019, has been quite a challenging year for our church, yet we will continue to worship and to defiantly praise our God. In fact, things have been difficult for the entire nation. Despite it all, we are called to celebrate because our God has not changed, and we are not to change toward our God no matter what is happening around us. God still deserves to be praised, honored, and glorified. Despite all that the people of God might face, we are reminded that the eternal God of all creation, who sits high and looks low, sees and knows all things. We are to **be defiant in the face of distress, discouragement, oppression, and shout out to God with a voice of triumph.** We are to pay attention to the condition of our hearts and soul and pray to be kept in God's Grace and favor. When we stumble or slip, we are to return with confession and repentance that we might be forgiven. SO, AS WE ARE REMEMBERING OUR 119 YEARS OF EXISTENCE AS A CHURCH, AS WE DARE TO REJOICE IN THE FACE OF ALL THAT IS GOING ON AROUND US... I ENCOURAGE US TO DEFIANTLY AND TRIUMPHANTLY SHOUT "HALLELUJAH! THANKS BE TO GOD! WE DECLARE VICTORY AS WE ADVANCE INTO THE NEXT YEAR AHEAD OF US. WE DECLARE THAT WE SHALL PROSPER AND BE IN GOOD HEALTH. WE AFFIRM THAT OUR GOD IS MERCIFUL AND GRACIOUS TOWARD US AND WILL NOT LET THE ENEMY HAVE DOMINION OVER US. WE DECLARE WITH DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING THAT "WE SHALL OVERCOME SOME DAY." WE DECLARE WITH THE APOSTLE PAUL THAT WE OVERCOME BY THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB AND BY THE POWER OF OUR TESTIMONY THAT JESUS CHRIST IS LORD AND SAVIOR TO THE GLORY AND HONOR OF THE FATHER. HE IS THE ONLY LORD. AND AT THE MENTION OF HIS NAME EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW AND EVERY TONGUE CONFESS THAT HE IS LORD. There is no other Lord, but the Lord Jesus Christ!!! Every other one is fake. If we believe that **we are more than conquerors through faith in Christ who shed His blood for the atonement of our sins, then we trust and have confidence that something GOOD is going to happen to us. Repeat out loud: "SOMETHING GOOD IS GOING TO HAPPEN TO US/TO ME!" Do you believe this? Do you desire this? Then let us speak it to ourselves often.**

May the LORD, Jehovah God of heaven and earth, open for us the windows of heaven and pour out for us the Latter and the Former blessings of abundance in and upon our lives, our church, our health, our families, and our general well-being. IF YOU BELIEVE IT --SAY... Thank you Abba / Father! In the name of the Son, Christ Jesus, we say: AMEN.

Now let us wait and watch for God to answer our prayers, our declarations, and affirmations lifted with faith and with thanksgiving in the Mighty Name of Christ Jesus, our Strong Tower, our Intercessor, and Great High Priest. For --This is the day the Lord has made; we shall rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118: 24)

Rev. Brenda R. Berry/ Pastor-Moderator---U.H.P.C.

